

1240-60: a Watershed in Anglo-Jewish Relations?

THE TITLE OF this article¹ I owe to Professor Barrie Dobson, whose 1979 article on 'The decline and expulsion of the medieval Jews of York' is the finest study we have of the decades which preceded the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290. Reflecting on the melancholy history of thirteenth-century Anglo-Jewry, Dobson conceded that

the erratic rise and fall of the medieval English Jewry is one of those historical phenomena notable for the number of possible turning-points at which no turn was made. Nevertheless, 1255, the year of Aaron of York's bankruptcy, of little Hugh's mysterious death at Lincoln, and of Henry III's mortgaging of the entire Jewish community to his younger brother, Richard of Cornwall, may have marked a genuine divide. The corrosive effects of excessive tallages on the one side and of increased anti-Jewish propaganda and blood-libel accusations on the other seem to have made the mid-1250s a real watershed in the history of Anglo-Jewish relations.²

In a 1985 article published in the *Hebrew Union College Annual*, I took up this suggestion of a mid-century watershed, while arguing that, financially speaking, the real turning-point came in 1241, when the first of a series of massive Jewish tallages was imposed by the royal government.³ It struck me then to wonder whether these corrosive royal tallages and the rising tide of anti-Jewish feeling during these two decades were related by more than chronological coincidence. It now seems clear that they were, and that Crown financial policy and its consequences was one of the crucial factors which lay behind the worsening relations between Christians and Jews in mid thirteenth-century England. Social attitudes are complicated constructions, and royal financial policy was undoubtedly not the only factor which lay behind the spate of anti-Jewish incidents which marked these two decades. Anti-Jewish sentiment in medieval Europe has a long and complex history behind it prior to 1240 which cannot be ignored. But Crown financial policy during these decades not only contributed to these attitudes; it also

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented as a paper to the Anglo-American Conference of Historians in July 1987. I would like to express my thanks to the organizers of the conference for this most welcome invitation, and to the participants for their criticisms and suggestions.

² R. B. Dobson, 'The decline and expulsion of the medieval Jews of York', *Trans. Jewish Hist. Soc. of England*, xxvi (1979), 34-52, at p. 36.

³ R. C. Stacey, 'Royal taxation and the social structure of medieval Anglo-Jewry: the tallages of 1239-42', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, lvi (1985), 175-249.

Jewish Tallages, 1186-1260

1186, Christmas	90,000 marks (?)	
1188	10,000 marks (?)	
1190-1	2,000 marks	
1194	5,000 marks	
	3,000 marks (ransom)	
1199-1200	4,000 marks	
1207	4,000 marks + $\frac{1}{10}$ of bonds	
1210	60,000 marks	
1221	1,500 marks	
1223	3,000 marks	
1225-6	6,000 marks	
1229-31	8,000 marks	
1232-6	10,000 marks	
1239-40	$\frac{1}{3}$ of chattels	
1241-2	20,000 marks	
1244-50	60,000 marks	
Trinity 1244		8,000 marks (?)
Christmas 1244		4,000 marks
Easter 1245		4,000 marks (?)
Michaelmas 1245		4,000 marks
Easter 1246		4,000 marks
Michaelmas 1246		4,000 marks (?)
Easter 1247		2,000 marks
Michaelmas 1247		2,000 marks
Easter 1248		2,000 marks
Michaelmas 1248		2,000 marks
1249		5,000 marks (?)
Michaelmas 1249		760 marks
Martinmas 1249		500 marks
Easter 1250		500 marks
1250	10,000 marks	
Michaelmas 1250		5,000 marks
Martinmas 1250		5,000 marks
1251-2	5,000 marks	
Martinmas 1251		3,500 marks
Hilary 1252		1,000 marks
June 1252		500 marks
1252, Martinmas	4,000 marks	
1253, July	5,000 marks	
1254	10,000 marks	
Easter 1254		5,000 marks
Pentecost 1254		5,000 marks

1255, Hilary	2,000 marks	
1255-6: Earl Richard	8,000 marks	
Trinity 1255		1,500 marks
Michaelmas 1255		1,500 marks
Feb. 1256		1,500 marks
Trinity 1256		1,500 marks
Martinmas 1256		2,000 marks
1259	1,000 marks	
Easter 1259		500 marks
Michaelmas 1259		500 marks
1260	1,000 marks	
Easter 1260		500 marks
Michaelmas 1260		500 marks

helped to structure the specific forms which anti-Jewish feeling assumed in mid thirteenth-century England. Such, at least, is the argument of this article.

In 1241, royal policy towards Jewish taxation changed dramatically, as the accompanying table reveals. Regular royal taxation of the Jews seems to have begun only in the eleven-eighties, and its incidence and severity prior to the reign of Henry III remains obscure.⁴ The list presented in the table should therefore be regarded as a tentative one. It appears, however, that prior to 1241 the only really large recorded tallage which was certainly assessed was the 60,000 mark tallage (plus an additional 6,000 marks in Queen's gold) imposed by John in 1210. This tallage, combined with the civil wars between 1215 and 1217, devastated English Jewry. Entire Jewish communities disappeared, a generation of Jewish leaders was wiped out through death, flight or execution, and many of the records of Jewish debts in London and elsewhere were destroyed by the baronial partisans. The Jewish community which greeted Henry III's accession was a greatly enfeebled one, and Henry's councillors treated it accordingly. Between 1221 and 1239 they taxed the Jews at a modest, effectively annual rate of between 2,000 and 3,000 marks per year, a rate which guaranteed a satisfactory flow of cash into the exchequer, but which did not obstruct the financial recovery of the Jewish community.⁵ This pattern began to change in 1239, when a new set of royal administrators demanded from the Jews a third of all their debts and goods.⁶ The receipts from this levy were disappointing, however, and in 1241 a new tax of 20,000 marks was assessed for payment within a year.⁷ In 1244, a 60,000 mark tallage was proclaimed, to be collected over the following five years, although it appears that only about 40,000

⁴ H. G. Richardson, *The English Jewry under Angevin Kings* (1960), pp. 161-75 offers the most thorough analysis of Jewish taxation during the 1154-1216 period.

⁵ See Stacey, 'Royal taxation', pp. 177-9 for details of the taxation during these years.

⁶ R. C. Stacey, *Politics, Policy and Finance under Henry III, 1216-45* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 132-48.

⁷ *Close Rolls* (hereafter *Cl.R.*) 1237-42, pp. 312, 334, and Stacey, 'Royal taxation', *passim*.

marks were ever in fact assessed.⁸ This tallage petered out in 1249 without having reached its target; but in 1250 a new tax was announced, to extend over the following seven years.⁹ 10,000 marks were assessed in 1250,¹⁰ 4,500 marks in 1251 and again in 1252,¹¹ 5,000 marks in 1253 to support the king's Gascon expedition,¹² and 10,000 marks for the same purpose were assessed in 1254.¹³ An additional 2,000 marks were due in January 1255,¹⁴ after which Henry turned over all his rights to Jewish taxation to Richard of Cornwall, who was supposed to receive a further 8,000 marks from this source by the end of 1256.¹⁵ Richard soon discovered, however, that by 1255 the Jews simply could not produce such sums: despite extending the terms on these debts into a third year, Richard was probably still trying to collect this money from the Jews in 1258 when the baronial reformers seized control of the king's council and began to re-orient the king's Jewish policy. No further royal taxation of the Jews is recorded until Easter 1259, when the king initiated a yearly 'arentation' of the Jewry at a rate of 1,000 marks per year, payable in two equal instalments at Easter and Michaelmas.¹⁶

Between 1241 and 1255, the king thus assessed close to 100,000 marks in direct taxation against the Jews of England, more than three times what he had assessed between 1221 and 1239. If the taxation paid to Earl Richard is included, the entire sum paid over by the Jews approaches 110,000 marks; and even this amount takes no account of the further sums the Jews may have paid in Queen's gold on Jewish tallages. But can we place any credence in such numbers? Ever since H. G. Richardson poured cold water over the highly inflated lists of Jewish tallages compiled by Elman and Roth,¹⁷ it has become conventional to doubt whether any of these larger tallages were in fact ever paid, or indeed could ever have been paid. We are dealing, after all, with a Jewish community of less than 5,000 men, women and children;¹⁸ and medieval numbers are, of course, notoriously unreliable, especially when reported by chroniclers, most of whom tended to use them adjectively to express scales of magnitude rather than to represent any actual count.

⁸ See Table. References to this tax are scattered across the chancery and exchequer rolls for the period. The table is based mainly on *Calendar of Liberate Rolls* (hereafter *C.L.R.*) 1240-5, pp. 206, 239, 243, 256, 271; *Cl.R.* 1242-7, pp. 273-4, 339, 395, 428, 447, 504, 506, 531; *Calendar of Patent Rolls* (hereafter *C.P.R.*) 1232-47, p. 445; *C.L.R.* 1245-51, pp. 69, 72, 74, 103, 110, 150, 217, 264; *Cl.R.* 1247-51, pp. 22, 57, 74, 83, 86, 238; *C.P.R.* 1247-58, p. 46; Fine Roll 28 Henry III (Public Record Office, C 60/41 m.9); *ibid.*, E 401/18 m. 11; E 401/19 mm. 1, 10; and *Calendar of the Plea Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews* (hereafter *Plea Rolls*), i, ed. J. M. Rigg (1905), pp. 74-5.

⁹ *C.L.R.* 1245-51, p. 264.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 324, 345; *Cl.R.* 1247-51, pp. 523, 389, 418, 461-2, 472.

¹¹ *Cl.R.* 1251-3, pp. 178, 25, 189 for the 1251 taxes; *C.L.R.* 1251-60, pp. 48, 65; *Cl.R.* 1251-3, pp. 107, 135, 138, 143; and P.R.O., E 401/20 and E 101/249/8 for the 1252 taxes.

¹² *Cl.R.* 1251-3, p. 386; *C.L.R.* 1251-60, p. 145; *C.P.R.* 1247-58, p. 209.

¹³ *C.L.R.* 1251-60, pp. 169, 195-6; *Cl.R.* 1253-4, pp. 62-3, 85-6; *Cl.R.* 1254-6, pp. 6, 24, 188; *C.P.R.* 1247-58, p. 315; P.R.O., E 101/249/8; E 401/25; E 401/26; E 401/1566.

¹⁴ *Cl.R.* 1254-6, p. 24.

¹⁵ *C.P.R.* 1247-58, pp. 400-1, 439-40, 441-4, 494; *Cl.R.* 1254-6, pp. 140, 241.

¹⁶ P.R.O., E 401/40-44; E 101/250/14; *C.P.R.* 1258-66, p. 39; *Cl.R.* 1259-61, pp. 96-7, 365, 398-9, 431-2.

¹⁷ Dobson, p. 36.

¹⁸ V. D. Lipman, 'The anatomy of medieval Anglo-Jewry', *Trans. Jewish Hist. Soc. of England*, xxi (1968), 64-5.

With respect to these particular tallage figures, however, such scepticism is unwarranted. The exchequer, after all, *could* count, whether chroniclers could or not; and wherever adequate records of exchequer receipts survive between 1241 and 1255, we find that the bulk of the sums assessed in Jewish taxation were in fact being paid. Accounts for the 20,000 mark tallage survive. They show that it was paid in full within a year, and even more remarkably, that it was paid almost entirely in cash.¹⁹ The records of receipt for this tallage are now in print, and no more needs to be said about them here, except to note that the king's apparent insistence on cash payments in 1241-2 was highly unusual. Ordinarily, Jews paid their taxes in part by signing over collectible bonds to the exchequer, which would credit the Jew for the value of the bond, and then either collect the bond itself, or resell the bond for cash to another lender, either Christian or Jewish. Henry's apparent insistence on cash payments toward this tax must have reduced considerably the liquid capital by which the Jews might subsequently have been able to restore their losses to taxation.

Records for the other tallages imposed between 1241 and 1255 are not so good as for the 20,000 mark tallage, but they nonetheless are good enough to suggest that the king probably did collect something close to the approximately 100,000 marks he assessed in Jewish taxation during these years. Between 1244 and 1249, we have complete records of receipt for only one term of the ostensible 60,000 mark tallage. Significantly, however, these records reveal that of the 4,000 marks assessed for payment at Michaelmas 1245, at least 3,785 marks were actually paid in cash and bonds.²⁰ Between 1250 and 1255, records are somewhat better; and once again we find that where records survive, they show that tallage assessments were being paid, albeit with increasing difficulty. Of the 5,000 marks due at Michaelmas 1250, at least 3,000 marks had been collected and disbursed within a month;²¹ of the 5,000 marks due the king before his 1253 crossing to Gascony, 4,054 had been received by the date of the crossing, and the remaining 1,000 marks were borrowed from Richard of Cornwall, to be repaid him within the month;²² while of the 5,000 marks due at Easter 1254, at least 3,900 marks in cash can be accounted for on the receipt rolls of the lower exchequer, exclusive of any bonds which may have been credited.²³ In short, wherever the records allow us to compare the sums assessed in Jewish taxation against the sums collected between 1241 and 1255, we find that something close to the assessed amounts was in fact being paid. We can take these tallage figures seriously, it seems, and begin therefore to consider the impact of this massive transfer of wealth upon the realm.

On the Jews, of course, the effects of these tallages were disastrous. Financially, the tallages produced a kind of spiral of collapse, in which Jewish creditors were forced to liquidate future assets to defray present burdens. The 20,000 mark tallage had already soaked up much of the Jews' immediate liquid wealth; the taxes which followed probably had to be paid out of their bonds, either by distraining their

¹⁹ Stacey, 'Royal taxation', *passim*.

²⁰ P.R.O., E 401/19 m. 10.

²¹ *Cl.R.* 1247-51, pp. 321, 339-40.

²² *C.L.R.* 1251-60, p. 145; *C.P.R.* 1247-58, p. 209; *Cl.R.* 1251-3, p. 386.

²³ P.R.O., E 401/25 m. 15; E 401/26 m. 14; E 401/1566.

debtors directly for immediate payment, or else by selling their bonds at a discount to other lenders. As the tax pressure mounted, Jews were increasingly forced to sell their bonds at deeper discounts than usual, or to accept far less than the face value of the bond from their debtors, simply because their own need for immediate cash was so pressing. Aaron son of Abraham, for example, in 1253 agreed to acquit a debt of £340 for £130, and to delay repayment of even this reduced sum for seven years, in return for an immediate cash payment of 100 marks;²⁴ and Aaron, as one of the king's favoured Jewish officials, was paying only a fraction of the tallage debts which other, less favoured Jews were paying.²⁵ Fewer Jews now had the money to purchase these bonds from their fellow Jews; Christians, instead, seem to have become the primary purchasers, a fact of some consequence, as will be suggested later. Some sign of just how cash poor the Jews had become by the mid twelfth-fifties is provided by the receipt roll for the 5,000 mark tallage due at Easter 1254. Of the approximately 4,000 marks accounted on the roll, more than 1,000 marks were paid directly by Christians on behalf of their Jewish creditors.²⁶ Indeed, by 1255 the Jews had become so desperate that they made a formal request to leave the kingdom, a threat which the king took seriously enough to order the closure of the East Anglian and Cinque Ports to all Jews seeking passage overseas.²⁷ Permission to leave was of course refused; and to make matters worse, in the following year the Jews became the unwitting victims of yet another of Henry's financial schemes. Henry had for about a decade been collecting a gold treasure in his exchequer; by 1257 his debts had become so pressing that he was forced to spend it. To do so, he inaugurated his famous gold coinage, the effect of which was to flood the London gold market, thereby reducing the effective exchange rate of gold to silver by about fifteen per cent. This had a disproportionate impact upon the Jews, because they tended to store their capital in gold, converting it into silver only as necessary.²⁸ Although the king continued to insist on a 10:1 exchange rate for his own gold coins (which consequently few would willingly accept), the Jews were probably forced to settle for the new market rate of approximately 8.5:1 when they exchanged their own stored gold for silver.²⁹ The only consolation was that in their current state of impoverishment, they probably held considerably less gold in 1257 than they had held a decade or so earlier.

Under the pressure of these tallages, it appears that the internal solidarity of the Jewish community also began to break down. By 1255, the fortunes of most of the great magnates who had dominated Anglo-Jewry since the twelve-twenties had been destroyed; those few who survived did so on the basis of special reductions on

²⁴ *Select Pleas, Stairs, and Other Records from the Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews, 1220-80* (hereafter *Select Pleas*), ed. J. M. Rigg (Selden Soc., xv, 1902), pp. 15-16.

²⁵ See nn. 33 and 34 below.

²⁶ P.R.O., E 401/1566.

²⁷ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard (7 vols., Rolls Ser., 1872-84), v. 441 (sub anno 1254), 487-8; *Cl.R.* 1254-6, p. 227.

²⁸ For instances of Jews storing their capital in gold, see *Cl.R.* 1256-9, p. 459; *Cl.R.* 1259-61, p. 1; *Select Pleas*, p. 73.

²⁹ See D. Carpenter, 'The gold treasure of King Henry III', *Thirteenth-Century England I: Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference*, ed. P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (Woodbridge, 1986), pp. 77-82.

their tallage debts negotiated with the king. During the twelve-forties, the vast fortunes of men like Aaron and Samuel of York, David of Oxford, and Aaron and Elias Blund of London probably helped to shield the rest of the Jewish community from the full weight of the king's demands. In 1241-2, the ten greatest men personally paid more than seventy-five per cent of the 20,000 mark tallage.³⁰ They probably bore a similar percentage of the 60,000 mark tallage. By 1250, however, their increasing desperation is clear. In 1251, Aaron and Elias Blund were arrested while trying to flee with their families from England and from the king's most recent tallage.³¹ By 1255, Aaron of York, the greatest of all these magnates, had paid over his entire fortune in taxation and was officially declared a pauper, his tallage debts distributed among the rest of the Jews in the kingdom.³² His successors as leaders of the Jewish community, however, were not so selfless. Although Aaron son of Abraham had contributed 1,200 marks towards the 20,000 mark tallage, he paid only 53½ marks per term towards the tallages assessed between 1247 and 1249,³³ and paid only 100 marks per year (later increased to 200 marks) against all the tallages imposed between 1250 and 1254.³⁴ As one of the king's two most important Jewish officials, Aaron secured these preferential arrangements from the king as a special favour. Elias l'Eveske, the archpresbyter who succeeded Aaron of York in office, made a similar arrangement: he paid only £100 per year for all the tallages assessed between 1250 and 1254.³⁵ What these great men did not pay had to be paid by others. While Aaron and Elias paid only about 250 marks between them toward the 10,000 mark tallage of 1250, they ordered Aaron of York to pay 2,000 marks of this tallage personally.³⁶

Understandably, complaints by their fellow Jews about unfair assessments of tallage were rife during these years.³⁷ In 1247, the Jews of Canterbury paid to have a local Jew present at the assessments, because they did not trust the Jewish representatives from other towns to tax them fairly.³⁸ In 1248 an Oxford Jew paid three marks to be quit of the forthcoming Michaelmas tallage, by the favour of Aymer de Lusignan, the king's half-brother.³⁹ In the early twelve-fifties, Samuel Blund complained repeatedly that he was being assessed too heavily by half, and offered the king a fine to be tallaged in accord with the value of his chattels, like the rest of the Jews of London;⁴⁰ while Solomon l'Eveske, after having his fine to avoid tallages revoked, complained that he too was being assessed too much by half relative to his fellow Jews.⁴¹ The key to preferential treatment in the assessments was, of course,

³⁰ Stacey, 'Royal taxation', pp. 201-3.

³¹ *Cl.R.* 1251-3, pp. 49, 61, 100.

³² *Cl.R.* 1254-6, p. 140.

³³ *Cl.R.* 1242-7, p. 531; *Cl.R.* 1247-51, pp. 22, 83, 86; *C.P.R.* 1247-58, p. 48.

³⁴ *C.P.R.* 1247-58, pp. 48, 71, 128, 129; *Cl.R.* 1247-51, pp. 523, 544, 456-7, 544-5.

³⁵ *C.P.R.* 1247-58, pp. 71, 128, 129; *Cl.R.* 1247-51, pp. 523, 544-5, 456-7.

³⁶ *Cl.R.* 1247-51, p. 523.

³⁷ In addition to the references which follow, see also *Cl.R.* 1247-51, p. 500; *Cl.R.* 1251-3, p. 67; *Cl.R.* 1253-4, p. 318; *Cl.R.* 1254-6, p. 188.

³⁸ *Cl.R.* 1242-7, pp. 504, 506.

³⁹ *Cl.R.* 1247-51, p. 74.

⁴⁰ *Cl.R.* 1251-3, pp. 178, 199-200, 115, 382.

⁴¹ *C.P.R.* 1247-58, p. 130; *Cl.R.* 1251-3, p. 382.

royal favour;⁴² but while this might guarantee a relative and temporary prosperity, this was purchased at the cost of a markedly increased distrust between the king's favoured Jewish officials and the rest of the Jewish community. Aaron son of Abraham died in 1256, still high in the king's favour, and so still protected from the wrath of his fellow Jews; but when Elias l'Eveske fell from the king's grace in 1257 and was dismissed from office, he was despoiled of his wealth by the king, and became finally a convert to Christianity, shortly after the Jewish community offered the king three gold marks if he would promise never again to appoint Elias to office.⁴³ The hatred his career aroused is a striking demonstration of the havoc these tallages caused at all levels within the Jewish community.

Although less dramatic, the tallages had far-reaching consequences for Henry III's Christian subjects also. The traffic in Jewish bonds can be measured only impressionistically, but there seems little doubt but that this traffic increased considerably during these years. Moreover, a greater number of these bonds were now being transferred into the hands of Christians than previously, simply because fewer Jews any longer had the cash available with which to buy them. Those Jews who could still afford to purchase such debts continued to do so—Aaron son of Abraham was one of the biggest such purchasers—but the bulk of the business had probably fallen to Christians by 1260. This was an important change. When Jews lent money on the security of rural property, they did not usually want permanent possession of the land. If an estate did come to them to repay a debt, they generally took seisin of the property only for a term of years, until they had collected what was owed them from its proceeds. Prior to 1271, there was nothing legally to prevent Jews from taking actual possession of feudal property, and occasionally they did indeed do so.⁴⁴ But outside the cities this was never their primary aim, and they therefore usually sold the agricultural estates which came into their possession relatively quickly. Christian purchasers of Jewish debts were different. Their aim was more often to acquire permanent possession of the mortgaged estate, not simply to secure repayment of the debt. And as one can see from the careers of such figures as Geoffrey de Langley and Walter de Merton, they were frequently successful in this aim. With the encumbered estates he acquired in this manner, Geoffrey de Langley established a knightly family. With his estates, Walter de Merton established the Oxford college which still bears his name.⁴⁵

Langley and Merton were among the horde of men around Henry III's court who participated in this traffic in Jewish bonds during these years. The men who profited most from such debts, however, were the king's brother, Richard of

⁴² Or the favour of a member of the royal family: cf. Aymer de Lusignan above, and also the efforts of Archbishop Boniface of Savoy to lower the tallage assessments of a Canterbury Jew (*Cl.R.* 1253-4, p. 318).

⁴³ *C.P.R.* 1247-58, pp. 570-1; *Charter Rolls 1257-1300*, pp. 8, 16. This would have been the equivalent of 30 silver marks.

⁴⁴ P. R. Hyams, 'The English statutes of Jewry, 1269-75', delivered in Jerusalem, Apr. 1987, corrects the widely held presumption to the contrary. For examples of Jews holding such possession, see *Cl.R.* 1242-7, pp. 136, 137, 150; *Cl.R.* 1247-51, pp. 50, 346; *C.P.R.* 1258-66, p. 445.

⁴⁵ For Langley, see P. R. Coss, 'Sir Geoffrey de Langley and the crisis of the knightly class in 13th-century England', *Past and Present*, lxxviii (Aug. 1975), 3-37; for Merton, *The Early Rolls of Merton College, Oxford*, ed. J. R. L. Highfield (Oxford Hist. Soc., new ser., xviii, 1964), esp. pp. 12-13, 17, 34-6.

Cornwall, and his Poitevin half-brothers, William de Valence and Geoffrey, Aymer and Guy de Lusignan.⁴⁶ When Henry III granted Richard proprietary possession of the Jew Abraham de Berkhamsted in 1255, the earl acquired more than £1,800 worth of collectible debts originally owed to Abraham.⁴⁷ This was bad enough; but to make matters worse, the king turned also to such Jewish bonds as a way to endow his despised Poitevin half-brothers with lands and revenues. Geoffrey de Lusignan was promised 500 marks' worth of such debts from the exchequer, but appears never to have received them: he settled instead for the same sum out of the eyre issues of York and Norfolk.⁴⁸ His brother Guy received 550 marks' worth of such debts in 1256, on which he promptly began distraining for payment, and received an additional 100 marks' worth in 1257.⁴⁹ Aymer de Lusignan appears to have bought his bonds on the open market;⁵⁰ but the really big gainer from such debts was William de Valence, to whom the king granted all the Jewish debts arising from the estate of William de Lancaster, along with permission to compel Lancaster's heirs to come to terms with him. Valence was able to force the two heirs to pay him 720 marks per year against these debts, and he held a further 720 marks beyond this in unresolved bonds against these same estates. The estates themselves were not worth as much as this, the heirs complained; and after Valence fled the realm in 1258, the baronial council reduced their terms to 100 marks per annum each, a reduction which lasted only so long as did baronial control over the king.⁵¹ By 1258, Valence's total income from these and other properties encumbered by Jewish debts may have approached 1,000 marks per year.⁵²

Lusignan involvement in this abusive traffic did not pass unnoticed. Reform of the Jewish exchequer was one of the desiderata expressed by the baronial reformers in 1258,⁵³ and was still being promised in the autumn of 1259.⁵⁴ It is likely that the complaint expressed in 1258 in the *Petitio Baronum*, 'that Jews sometimes transfer their debts, and the lands pledged to them, to magnates and other powerful persons in the kingdom, who on this pretext enter the lands of lesser men . . . so that . . . evident peril and manifest disherison plainly threaten those to whom the holdings

⁴⁶ Queen Eleanor's involvement in this trade is already well known: see for example *C.P.R.* 1247-58, p. 635; *Cl.R.* 1259-61, p. 501.

⁴⁷ *C.P.R.* 1247-58, pp. 393, 396, 403; *Cl.R.* 1254-6, pp. 170-2, 203-4; the sum is from N. Denholm-Young, *Richard of Cornwall* (Oxford, 1947), p. 70.

⁴⁸ *C.P.R.* 1247-58, pp. 489, 535.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 485; *Cl.R.* 1254-6, pp. 327, 361; *Cl.R.* 1256-9, pp. 7-8, 113, 27, 126.

⁵⁰ *Cl.R.* 1254-6, p. 429; *Cl.R.* 1256-9, p. 24.

⁵¹ *C.P.R.* 1258-66, p. 4. This lasted only until 1261, when Henry restored the original terms, and began distraining the heirs for their arrears (cf. *Cl.R.* 1259-61, p. 485; *C.P.R.* 1258-66, pp. 205, 218, 223).

⁵² *C.P.R.* 1247-58, pp. 29, 33, 41, 543-4, 547; *C.L.R.* 1245-51, pp. 270, 274; *Cl.R.* 1247-51, p. 123; *Cl.R.* 1256-9, pp. 446-7; *Cl.R.* 1259-61, p. 485; *Charter Rolls* 1226-57, p. 455; *Select Pleas*, pp. 59-60; *Pleas Rolls*, i. 228.

⁵³ Provisions of Oxford cap. 17, in *Documents of the Baronial Movement of Reform and Rebellion*, ed. R. F. Treharne and I. J. Sanders (Oxford, 1973), pp. 108-9; cf. also *Cl.R.* 1256-9, pp. 318-19 (8 July 1258), in which Henry declares his intention to ordain concerning the Jewry on 28 July *per consilium suum*; in the meantime he orders all Jewish prisoners in Wallingford, Winchester and the Tower of London freed.

⁵⁴ Provisions of Westminster, administrative, cap. 23, in *Documents of the Baronial Movement*, pp. 154-5.

belonged',⁵⁵ was specifically directed against the Lusignans and their agents. As with so many of the grievances of 1258, the reformers' attention was probably focused on a general abuse by the fact that the hated Lusignans were specifically associated with it.⁵⁶ In this respect, the Jewish tallages which throughout the twelve-forties and fifties helped to support Henry's government financially also helped to bring it down politically in 1258.

One other development during these years deserves to be mentioned, which appears also to have been a consequence of the pressures created by excessive Jewish tallages. The traditional way for Christian debtors to handle Jewish debts which had grown beyond their capacity to repay was to seek the king's help in getting them attorned for payment. This was usually accomplished by means of a royal writ of extent, which ordered that the debtor's estates be valued, and terms established for the repayment of his debt which would not impoverish the debtor or cause him to lose his land. Prior to 1241, the terms set for such repayments were usually extremely lenient; and even during the twelve-fifties one can still find occasional examples of very large debts being set for repayment at very long terms. One debt of almost £280 was attorned for payment at £2 5s 4d per year during the twelve-fifties, a rate which would require 125 years for its complete repayment.⁵⁷ But a strong impression is given that such writs of extent and attornment become much less commonly available in the twelve-fifties than they had been previously, even though the pressure to repay Jewish debts was considerably greater.⁵⁸ If this impression is correct, it may help to explain the particular concern of de Montfort and his supporters with Jewish indebtedness in 1258 and after: the pressure on Christian debtors to Jews may indeed have *been* worse during the twelve-fifties than it had been previously. And in the difficulties debtors were now having attorning their debts, we may also have a context in which to understand the concern with perpetual fee-rents owed by Christians to Jews, a concern which emerges for the first time during the twelve-fifties and sixties.

A fee rent was a yearly payment assigned on an estate for a term of years: as such they had long been a familiar feature of Jewish lending.⁵⁹ Perpetual fee-rents, however—annual payments of as much as fifty or sixty marks in some cases, assigned on an estate and to be paid until the end of time—were a new feature of Jewish lending in England, and appear for the first time during the twelve-fifties, probably as a result of the specific conditions which faced large debtors to Jews

⁵⁵ Cap. 25, in *Documents of the Baronial Movement*, pp. 86-7. Coss's translation of this passage is preferable to the editors' decision to render *minores* as 'minors' (see Coss, p. 29 and n. 124).

⁵⁶ D. Carpenter, 'What happened in 1258?', in *War and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of J. O. Prestwich*, ed. J. Gillingham and J. C. Holt (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 106-19; J. R. Maddicott, 'Magna Carta and the local community, 1215-59', *Past and Present*, cii (Feb. 1984), 54-61; and see also H. W. Ridgeway, 'The politics of the English royal court, 1247-65, with special reference to the role of aliens' (unpublished University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1983).

⁵⁷ *Plea Rolls*, i, 117; *Cl.R.* 1251-3, p. 325.

⁵⁸ The declining number of such writs is clearly demonstrable from the Close and Fine Rolls.

⁵⁹ Fee-rents were not, of course, restricted to Jewish lending, and in France played an important role in peasant agriculture (cf. G. Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*, trans. C. Postan (Columbia, 1968), pp. 252-7). The only previous discussion of these Jewish fee-rents in England is in Richardson, pp. 71-3, 104-7.

during these years. Debtors faced with Jewish debts they could not repay were now less often able to secure the royal writs of attermination and extent which might have rescued them from their distress, because the king himself had too direct an interest in facilitating the payment of these debts to defer them in the traditional way. Perpetual fee-rents emerged to fill this gap. Instead of attermining their debts, a debtor faced with a demand for immediate repayment which he could not meet would instead agree with his Jewish creditor to compound his debts into an annual, perpetual payment assigned on his estates. This solution provided the Jew with a predictable annual income, as well as with a highly marketable obligation which could be sold to another lender in difficult times. It also allowed the Christian debtor to retain his land. But in so doing, it also established a perpetual relationship of subjection between the Christian and his Jewish creditor; and in Christian eyes, of course, such a relationship was fundamentally offensive. Jews were suffered to coexist within Christian society only because they were useful to it as living symbols of the Passion of Christ; as such, their perpetual servitude to Christians was seen by Christians as incontrovertible proof that the Christians were right about Christ, and the Jews were wrong.⁶⁰ To reverse this relationship was a theological affront of the first order, and in 1269, in the first of a six-year series of anti-Jewish statutes, all such perpetual fee-rents owed by Christians to Jews were abolished. Any such fee-rents which had been transferred from Jews to Christians prior to this edict were, however to remain binding,⁶¹ an exception which makes clear the fundamentally ideological nature of the objections to them. There had been a particularly lively traffic in Jewish fee-rents in the years immediately after the Barons' Wars, the purchasers including the ubiquitous William de Valence, Roger de Leyburn, Roger Clifford, Alan la Zouche, and even Gilbert de Clare, earl of Gloucester.⁶² This 1269 provision may have been provoked by this traffic, and perhaps also by popular memories of Simon de Montfort's abolition of many such fee-rents, along with other Jewish debts, in 1264, which the king had reversed after Evesham.⁶³ But whatever the motives of this 1269 provision, the exceptions granted to it guaranteed that the king's supporters would suffer no losses because of it.

Both Christians and Jews suffered from this series of oppressive mid-century Jewish tallages. Their impact on relations between Christians and Jews was therefore predictably disastrous. The most important effect of these tallages on Anglo-Jewish relations was that the Jews and Jewish lending between 1240 and 1260 became much more visible to many more Christians than they had been previously; and for a despised minority group in a hostile foreign culture, visibility is almost always dangerous. Debtors were now being forced to resolve debts which previously would have been allowed to run on until they were attermined for

⁶⁰ For an interesting English reflection of this common medieval attitude, see William of Newburgh's account of the 1190 massacres in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett (4 vols., Rolls Ser., 1884-9), i. 316-17.

⁶¹ For the text of this statute, see *C.P.R. 1266-72*, p. 376; *Select Pleas*, pp. xlviii-li; and in Latin, *Cl.R. 1268-72*, p. 268.

⁶² *Plea Rolls*, i. 137, 138, 158-9, 199-200; *Charter Rolls 1257-1300*, pp. 39-40; *C.P.R. 1258-66*, p. 614; *Cl.R. 1264-8*, p. 428; *Select Pleas*, pp. 43-5, 49, 56-60.

⁶³ *C.P.R. 1258-66*, p. 628; *Select Pleas*, p. 44.

payment; Jewish debts were being transferred to the king's favourites on an alarming scale; and where a lord died lacking the resources to resolve his debts, sometimes even his agricultural tenants would be burdened with their repayment.⁶⁴ As a result, many more Christians were being brought into direct contact with the Jewish exchequer during these decades than previously, and into contact with the king's unscrupulous family as well. As Jews came to be seen by more and more people as the instruments of royal injustice, antagonism towards them grew. The consequences of this rising hostility are clear in the lootings, confiscations and assaults on Jews and their property which characterized the brief rule of de Montfort and his partisans in 1263 and 1264.⁶⁵

Jews were also becoming more visible for other reasons during these decades, reasons which had less to do with Crown financial policy than with the general currents of mid thirteenth-century European life. This was, of course, an era of intense crusading enthusiasm; and as the living symbols in Christian eyes of the crucifixion of the earthly Jesus, Jews had long since learned the dangers of crusades. In England, there had been no assaults on Jews by crusaders since 1190, until de Montfort's partisans donned the cross in their battle against King Henry III in 1264, and sacked the Jewries of Canterbury, London and Northampton in their zealotry.⁶⁶ But crusades by this date carried more danger than merely the threat of physical assault. By the mid thirteenth-century, the Jews were widely regarded by Christian society as a kind of standing injury to the realm, which it was the obligation of any crusading king to correct as part of his commitment to the crusade.⁶⁷ Louis IX responded to such expectations first with his *enquêtes* of 1247-8, then with the expulsion of Jews from France he ordered in 1253 while still in the Holy Land, and finally with the restrictive legislation against Jews and usury he pronounced in 1254 and again in 1269.⁶⁸ Henry III took the cross in 1250, but apart from declaring the customary exemption from usury for sworn crusaders,⁶⁹ he did nothing to address the 'Jewish problem' until 1253, when his Statute of Jewry imposed a series of social and religious restrictions on the Jews which had long been sought by the Church.⁷⁰ No new synagogues were to be built; services in existing synagogues were to be conducted in low voices, so that Christians would not hear them; Jews were not to buy or eat meat during Lent, lest they enjoy a pleasure which Christians were denied; they were not to enter churches except to pass through them; they were not to disparage Christianity nor impede fellow Jews from converting to it; they were not to have Christian nurses or servants; they were not to

⁶⁴ *Select Pleas*, p. 15, for one example.

⁶⁵ C. Roth, *A History of the Jews in England* (3rd edn., Oxford, 1964, repr. 1978), pp. 60-4.

⁶⁶ For de Montfort's army as crusaders, see *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. R. Luard (3 vols., Rolls Ser., 1890), ii. 495; and the anonymous 14th-century tract known as 'De bellis Lewes et Evesham', edited by J. O. Halliwell as *The Chronicle of William de Rishanger of the Barons' Wars* (Camden Soc., xv, 1840), pp. 30-1.

⁶⁷ I hope to develop this claim in a forthcoming article on crusade legislation.

⁶⁸ W. C. Jordan, *Louis IX and the Challenge of the Crusade* (Princeton, N.J., 1979), pp. 84-6, 154-7.

⁶⁹ *C.P.R.* 1247-58, pp. 75, 164; *Cl.R.* 1251-3, p. 231.

⁷⁰ *Cl.R.* 1251-3, pp. 312-13; for an English translation of this statute, see *Select Pleas*, p. xlix. For ecclesiastical efforts to enforce similar restrictions prior to 1253, see the indexed entries in *Councils and Synods, II*, ed. F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney (Oxford, 1964), p. 1425, s.v. 'Jews'.

have sexual relations with Christians; they were henceforth to reside only in towns which already had a resident Jewish community; and they were to wear the badge of their faith, a long-standing requirement apparently little enforced to this point in England.⁷¹ But Henry did nothing to address the problems which were arising in his kingdom as a result of the pressures of his own excessive Jewish tallages. In contrast to the measures of Louis IX, which were widely reported in England, Henry's provisions did not even mention Jewish usury or the traffic in Jewish bonds. Henry's failure to follow through on this as well as his other obligations as a crusader king seems to the present author to be one of the basic grievances which lay behind the baronial movement which toppled him in 1258.⁷²

The Church too must bear some responsibility for the increasing tensions between Christians and Jews in mid thirteenth-century England. Between 1239 and 1261, churchmen in England launched a sustained attack on royal intervention in judicial cases the Church regarded as pertaining to ecclesiastical jurisdiction.⁷³ One of their complaints was the fact that they were prohibited from trying Jews before church courts, and that the king consistently refused to allow them to compel Jews to accept such trials by proclaiming a boycott of the accused Jew from all commercial or social contact with Christians.⁷⁴ In a typical example of such a case, the bishop of London in 1245 forbade all Christians from selling food to the Jews of London. Precisely what provoked this order is not clear, but it was promptly overridden by the king.⁷⁵ Most of the Church's other complaints about Jewish policy were met by the 1253 statute; thereafter churchmen complained mostly about its non-enforcement. In fairness, however, it must be noted that the Church's policy toward the Jews in England could have been much more starkly hostile than it was. No blanket condemnations of Jewish usury appeared in England during these years, and despite Roth's presumption to the contrary,⁷⁶ there is no evidence at all that the popes' anti-Talmudic decrees in 1240 and 1244 ever had the slightest impact in England. Papal letters demanding such measures were certainly addressed to England, but we cannot determine whether they were ever actually read. It is fairly clear at least that they were never enforced.

The increasing tensions which characterized these two decades were tragically epitomized in the 1255 ritual murder case involving little St. Hugh of Lincoln.⁷⁷ There was a rash of such allegations during these years right across western Europe:

⁷¹ This is the view in Richardson, pp. 192-3, which is basically accepted here. Several fines paid during the 1220s 'pro tabula non portanda' suggest, however, that this requirement may have been at least sporadically enforced during that decade (cf. P.R.O., E 401/7 rots. 1, 6; E 401/9 rot. 4d for examples).

⁷² This case is argued at length in R. C. Stacey, 'Kingship and crusade in England, 1216-70', an unpublished paper delivered in Oxford and in London in 1981 and 1982. It is hoped that some of this material will be published shortly.

⁷³ G. B. Flahiff, 'The writ of prohibition to court Christian in the 13th century', *Mediaeval Studies*, vi (1944), 261-313; vii (1945), 229-90.

⁷⁴ Roth, pp. 54-5; see also W. C. Jordan, 'Christian excommunication of the Jews in the middle ages: a restatement of the issues', *Jewish Hist.*, i (Spring, 1986), 31-8.

⁷⁵ *Cl.R.* 1242-7, p. 378.

⁷⁶ Roth, p. 55.

⁷⁷ The best account of this incident is G. I. Langmuir, 'The knight's tale of young Hugh of Lincoln', *Speculum*, xlvii (1972), 459-82, whose account is largely followed here.

Frederick II in 1235 even summoned a special council, attended by a number of Jewish converts, to determine whether such cases actually occurred.⁷⁸ One of the sanest men of his age, he concluded that they did not, and declared his findings to the monarchs of England and France. But the popular enthusiasm for such cases was not so easily quenched. In 1244 a boy's body was found in the cemetery of St. Benet's in London. Jews were immediately suspected, converts were called to examine the body, and they declared, after considerable prompting, that the wounds were in the pattern of Hebrew letters which spelled out Jewish responsibility for the deed.⁷⁹ Although this created a flurry of local excitement sufficient to cause the canons of St. Paul's to claim and entomb the body, for some reason the cult did not catch on. Lincoln had better luck. By a fortuitous set of circumstances, one of King Henry's most trusted men, the former household steward John de Lexington, had accompanied the king northward in late August and September 1255 in order to hear judicial business *coram rege*. The royal entourage, accompanied by Lexington, thus happened to pass through Lincoln on its way south from York only a month or so after the discovery of Hugh's body.⁸⁰ Lexington was a local Lincoln man, whose family was prominently connected with the cathedral where Hugh's body had been laid to rest. A local Jew named Copin was already suspected of the crime, and John was able to extract a full confession from him, which implicated many of the leading Jews of Lincoln in a conspiracy as detailed and heinous as St. Hugh's most ardent champions could possibly have wished. Lexington had promised Copin immunity in return for his confession; but when the king heard Copin's story he was so horrified that he revoked the immunity, and ordered his immediate execution. Eighteen more Jews were executed in London a month or so later. The story became an immediate sensation, repeated and amplified in most of the major monastic chronicles, and giving rise even to a contemporary Anglo-Norman ballad. Its reverberations have echoed down almost to our own day. The story is significant to us here, however, partly as a reminder of where these Anglo-Jewish tensions were leading, and partly too because in its amplifications, especially by Matthew Paris, the story reveals some of the new themes in Anglo-Jewish relations which were beginning to emerge during the twelve-fifties, themes that reflect the deepening hostility between Christians and Jews which characterized this period, and which would continue to poison Anglo-Jewish relations right until the expulsion in 1290.

This suggestion of new themes is advanced tentatively, because attitudes are extremely difficult to measure, but Matthew Paris's treatment of his Jewish material does seem suggestive in this regard. A brief consideration of some of the themes Matthew employs in dealing with his Jewish material may be instructive, keeping in mind that essentially all of Matthew's works were composed between 1240 and 1259.⁸¹ Matthew was a true historian: not content with merely recording what happened, he sought to explain why things happened, and why people chose to act

⁷⁸ E. Kantorowicz, *Frederick II, 1194-1250*, trans. E. O. Lorimer (New York, 1957), pp. 413-15.

⁷⁹ *Chronica Majora*, iv. 377-8.

⁸⁰ This information is taken from an unpublished letter of C. A. F. Meekings, dated 12 Oct. 1972.

⁸¹ R. Vaughan, *Matthew Paris* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 49-109.

as they did. Sometimes, however, his material failed him; he simply did not know the full story behind an incident or event. And when confronted with refractory material or an absence of information, Matthew was frequently inclined to make something up.⁸² This is especially true with respect to events involving Jews. The 1239 third on moveables he declares, in an afterthought, to have been prompted by 'a certain homicide in the city, secretly perpetrated by the Jews'.⁸³ A circumcision case in Norwich he repeats three separate times, assigning a different date to it each time, and finally elaborating it into a veritable ritual murder trial.⁸⁴ Louis IX's expulsion of the Jews from France he explains as having been provoked by the Saracens' taunting the imprisoned king that Christians did not love their saviour very much if they permitted his murderers to live among them.⁸⁵ The 1250 arrest of Abraham de Berkhamsted Matthew explains by telling an impossible tale in which Abraham is alleged to have secured a painting of the Virgin and Child, which he located in his privy in such a way that it would be constantly defiled; that Abraham's wife discovered this, and pitying the Mother and Child cleaned the painting, at which point Abraham, in a rage, murdered his wife.⁸⁶ His account of the case of St. Hugh of Lincoln is similarly the product of Matthew's fertile imagination, although in this case he did have a foundation of real information which he could then embellish. But once again, the amount of reliable fact in Matthew's account is surprisingly small, as Professor Langmuir has shown.⁸⁷ As Dr. Hyams too has noted, 'comparison of his version with other, more sober sources reveals that he has transformed his material by the addition of details drawn from other stories about Jews'.⁸⁸ Matthew's accounts of Jews and their various crimes are, in short, almost entirely invented; and where common themes recur in these fictions, we are therefore entitled to take these themes seriously as indicative of Matthew's own attitudes and beliefs.

Matthew's Jewish stories reveal some characteristically thirteenth-century associations, which are relatively uncommon in any earlier period in England, but which were to have a long and tragic history thereafter. It is not suggested that Matthew was responsible for inventing these; quite the opposite, Matthew's attitudes and assumptions were probably fairly typical of his mid thirteenth-century milieu, and it is precisely for this reason that they are so interesting. Three themes in particular may be mentioned here: a vision of Jews as magicians and sorcerers; as guilty of secret crimes, especially murders; and the close association between Jews and excrement, most notably of course in the story Matthew tells to explain Abraham of Berkhamsted's imprisonment. All of these associations, with

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 131-6.

⁸³ *Chronica Majora*, iii. 543; for discussion of this and the Norwich circumcision case which follows, see Stacey, 'Royal taxation', pp. 179-81.

⁸⁴ *Chronica Majora*, iii. 305-6, 543; *ibid.*, iv. 30-1; V. D. Lipman, *The Jews of Medieval Norwich* (1967), pp. 59-62.

⁸⁵ *Chronica Majora*, v. 361-2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, v. 114-15; Langmuir, p. 463.

⁸⁷ Langmuir, *passim*.

⁸⁸ P. R. Hyams, 'The Jewish minority in mediaeval England, 1066-1290', *Jour. Jewish Studies*, xxv (1974), 282-3.

magic, murder and excrement, can be traced in some earlier source: although Matthew's assertion that Hugh of Lincoln was disembowelled for magical purposes is his own invention, his claim that Richard I banned the Jews from his coronation in 1189 because he feared they would cast a spell on him is taken straight from Roger Wendover, who appears to have invented it.⁸⁹ Allegations of secret Jewish crimes were of course a commonplace; and even the association between Jews and latrines can be traced in some earlier sources, in a 1205 letter of Pope Innocent III, for example, and in a collection of stories put together in England around 1215.⁹⁰

The associations themselves, then, were not unusual. Rather, what is striking about Matthew Paris's use of these associations is the way in which he brings them together to form a portrait of unpredictable, diabolical Jewish malice which he then employs to justify whatever punishments or penalties were in fact inflicted upon them by the Christian majority. Although any number of earlier chroniclers accuse the Jews of secret crimes, Matthew is the first regularly to employ such allegations as ostensible explanations for actual royal measures taken against them. It is the justificatory purpose of Matthew's fictional constructions which makes them so particularly striking and potentially so dangerous, and which sets them apart from any previous English chroniclers' accounts. Is it too far-fetched to see in Matthew's vision of such aimless Jewish malevolence a reflection of the popular attitudes which were being engendered between 1240 and 1260, as the consequences of the king's spoliative Jewish taxation worked themselves out in a similarly aimless and unpredictable way upon his Christian and his Jewish subjects? It would not, of course, be unusual for victims in any age to be blamed for the consequences of their own oppression; but if indeed one can see Matthew Paris in this light, it would mark one final respect in which these two decades were indeed a watershed in medieval Anglo-Jewish relations.

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⁸⁹ *Chronica Rogeri de Wendover*, ed. H. G. Hewlett (3 vols., Rolls Ser., 1886-9), i. 118-19.

⁹⁰ Langmuir, pp. 459, 463, 466-7.